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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6758
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0644
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4183
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7734
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5294
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3360
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1080
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001070

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

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SUBJECT: BURMA: REPORTS OF RENEWED FIGHTING IN KAREN STATE

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. A politically-active ethnic Karen relayed reports of renewed fighting in Karen State between KNU forces and the Burma Army-backed DKBA. The fighting reportedly began on October 28 when KNU forces attacked a Burma Army outpost in Kawkaeik in southern Karen State. Our contact cited speculation within the Karen community that exiled pro-democracy activist Mo The Zun encouraged the KNU to initiate the attack, but noted there was little evidence to substantiate this. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Dr. Simon Tha told Poloff that, according to sources in Karen State, on October 28 approximately 300 troops from the KNU's military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), attacked a Burma Army outpost near Kawkaeik killing four soldiers and stealing a small number of weapons. Approximately 1,000 soldiers from the Burma Army-backed Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have reportedly retaliated against KNLA forces east of Kawkaeik. Simon Tha also relayed reports DKBA forces attacked and burned eleven Christian Karen villages near Walley in southeastern Karen State near the Thai-Burma border. According to his sources, KNLA troops have killed two DKBA soldiers and DKBA and Burma Army forces captured two KNLA fighters so far in the fighting.

¶3. (C) Simon Tha said he received news of the hostilities from sources inside Karen State, including his wife and contacts in both the KNU and DKBA. He told us his wife, Dr. Rebecca Htin, is visiting a medical clinic near Kawkaeik and relayed first-hand accounts of the fighting. He said he has also spoken with members of the KNU as well as the wife of a senior DKBA commander, Mote Thon, all of whom reported renewed hostilities in southern Karen State. Neither the Embassy's DAO nor DEA offices have received any independent confirmation of the fighting from their sources.

¶4. (C) Simon Tha relayed speculation that exiled pro-democracy activist and All Burma Student Democratic Front founder Mo The Zun may have encouraged KNU General Secretary Man Sha to renew armed attacks. He said he heard radio broadcasts from Mo The Zun calling for ethnic groups to retain an "armed option" but clarified he did not hear him

calling for renewed fighting. He also told us contacts on the Thai-Burma border informed him the KNU remains in close contact with exiled pro-democracy groups leading to speculation these groups are working together. However, Simon Tha acknowledged he had no hard evidence to support the theory Mo The Zun encouraged the attacks and recognized a number of other factors could contribute to renewed hostilities in Karen State. DEA pointed out that Karen State remains an active drug-shipment region and commented renewed fighting could also be touched off by conflicts over the narcotics trade.

15. (C) Comment. Simon Tha's reports of renewed fighting are credible in light of his contacts throughout Karen State and the tendency for armed groups to renew hostilities annually at the end of the rainy season. We doubt any additional pressure is needed to produce armed resistance. The victims as usual will be the Karen people already living in misery. End Comment.
VILLAROSA